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NEW ZEALAND MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS AND RESEARCH

J. C. WILSON

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the possible lines of research in New Zealand history; and to put forward suggestions for the preservation of the archives and manuscripts important for this work. It is not claimed that the paper is either exhaustive in its scope or intended as a blueprint for research projects. I shall raise, but only in a very broad way, some of the questions which I believe might probably be taken up by the historians. If this leads to further discussion of these problems we will have accomplished something useful.

There has been in recent years a rapid growth in the output of books dealing with New Zealand history. The celebration of centennials, in particular, has given a strong stimulus to the writing of provincial and

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district histories and, to a much lesser degree, that of individual business houses. There have been signs also of a renewed interest by present-day historians in the middle and later periods of this country's development; and there has been a growing number of studies on special subjects. It is, however, still true to say that the greater part of our historical writing deals with the origins and early years of settlement of the colony. We all know the kind of books that form the larger part of our New Zealand collections: the recollections and reminiscences, the published letters and the journals of the early settlers; the descriptions of travellers of life in New Zealand, first of the Maori and later of Maori and European; the general histories like those of Rusden and Saunders. The emphasis of these books and many others falls heavily on the earlier years of our history. It is not true to say, of course, that the later periods have gone without their interpreters and recorders. We need only remind ourselves of the stimulating work of Reeves and other contemporary observers and of the contributions of later historians. Despite the value of this work, much of our history, especially of the middle and later periods, has yet to be written, while some, I suggest, has to be rewritten.

This concentration on the earlier years of our history is probably even more marked in our manuscript collections. Their greatest strength lies in the years before the eighteen-eighties. In the years that follow, the historian is frequently hampered by the gaps in our collections and, worse still, sometimes by the complete absence of material required. This has been due partly to the emphasis given by men like Turnbull and Hocken, although no one would question the tremendous value of their work. It is due also, I suspect, to the tendency we have to overemphasise the value of the earlier documents, especially the collectors' pieces. I do not suggest that this is the policy followed today by our libraries, but primacy is still the estimate popularly given to documents. It is a view, therefore, which must constantly be combated for it is to the detriment of our records as a whole. We need a wider understanding that records are no less important because they are produced in 1890 rather than 1860. Documents of every period are part of the body of evidence necessary to the historian. Unfortunately, there has already been considerable destruction of our later records. Time has always been necessary for the production of objective and more balanced histories; but for those concerned with the preservation of research material, time, far from being an ally, is in fact a dangerous enemy. The vigilance of the librarians and a well-developed tradition of care for our manuscripts and archives would do much to reduce the loss of records in the future.

It has been necessary to limit discussion in this paper to four aspects of our history; but even this brief survey should give a very good idea of what is wanted of us as custodians of manuscripts and archives. The aspects which will be discussed are the political alliances of the eighteen-eighties; the system of party government; the problems of local government; and, very briefly, economic development.

Political Alliances of the 1880s

The abolition of the Provincial Governments in 1876 marks the end of a phase in New Zealand's history. The next decade and a half, closing with the return of the Liberal Government in 1891, can properly be described as a transitional period in its political history. For the historian, it is largely unexplored territory. Most of the accounts and interpretations of this period have come to us from contemporary observers and we have come to accept, largely, their conclusions. The struggle between the Conservatives and Liberals, for example, has been accepted almost without question although it should be stressed the party system had not yet assumed the form we know it today.

One of the questions we should be asking is: What do we mean by Conservative and Liberal? This means we must penetrate beyond the party labels to study the individual men who composed the Parliaments of this period. To do this we want to know more about their personal background and connections; their political actions and speeches; how they voted and who they voted with on different issues; we want to know the areas they represented and the particular interests or needs of their areas. We also want to know more about groups like the Political Reform Association formed in Christchurch in 1887.

In other words we want a very great deal more detailed information about these men and for this we need original papers—correspondence, diaries, private memoranda and so on. But we need to do more than this. We need to build up card files of biographical information drawn from newspapers, political journals and sheets, business reports and oral communications. Each entry on the cards should show from where the information was obtained. I admit that a historian doing research in a particular field usually does his own biographical work. Nevertheless I think there is a good deal of merit in the idea of a general biographical project of this kind being undertaken by a research library. There are two obvious advantages to my mind: firstly the collection is permanent and, secondly, its existence would be commonly known. One word of warning, however, is needed; a project of this nature demands experience and judgement; if it is left to the untrained, money could be wasted and, worse still, the work would become a pitfall for the student.

In Canterbury we have been fortunate enough to interest Mr G. R. Macdonald in such a project, and for the past four years he has been gathering information on a very wide selection of Canterbury people, from 1850 to the early nineteen-hundreds. Although his work should not be confused with an edited dictionary of biography, it has already proved its value to many students. Similar work in other parts of New Zealand could enhance its value still more.

Political Parties in New Zealand

The system of Parliamentary Government in New Zealand is essentially government by party: for most of the time it has been a two-

party system—the Government party and the opposition party; or, if you wish, the party in power and the party seeking power. In these respects Government in New Zealand has evolved very much along the same lines as that of Great Britain.

The party system in our political life, as opposed to factional groups, emerged in the eighteen-nineties with the Liberal Government. Since then the electors have been wooed at varying times by the Reform, United, Coalition, National and Labour parties. So far, however, no completely adequate analysis of these various parties has been made either by historian or political scientist. What are some of the problems which would arise in a study of this kind and which we should be prepared to meet? We need information on the nature of the party programmes; the policy changes; the factors in the success or failure of a programme, and in the closely related question of the rise and decline of a party; and the personal background and interest of party members and supporters. We also need information on the party organisation, the rules governing party decisions, party discipline, and the source of political funds.

When we ask what has been or is being done to preserve the archives of these political parties, there is no comforting answer to give. The hopes of discovering even a small part of the archives of the Liberal and Reform parties must be considered slim and this may well be true also of the United and Coalition parties. These losses are serious, but they should spur us to action for the better preservation of party archives in the future. The archives of the present parties are not likely to be open for research during our life time, nor will they pass from the control of the parties. The parties should, however, be encouraged to take the proper measures themselves for the care and preservation of their records. Possibly the parties could find within their ranks persons who could act as archive officers.

We should also be doing much more to encourage the preservation of personal papers, not only of Ministers of the Crown and Members of Parliament, but also of other prominent men in the community. Undoubtedly there are difficulties in making papers of this nature freely available for research. These difficulties, however, will be largely removed by the passing of time. Meanwhile our task is to ensure their preservation.

Local Government

No one would deny that there is room for a great deal more serious thought and discussion on problems of local government in New Zealand than has been given in the past by either student or citizen. The study of local government may be approached from two levels. There are the problems which must be discussed and solved at the national level, the most important being how large a part should be given a local government in the government of the country and on what conditions. Sound appraisal of the local government structure

as a whole depends, however, on studies by the historian and others at the level of the individual local authority. What are needed are more monographs on how the individual local authorities work and have worked in practice. How far, for example, have the powers and the area of administration of local authorities been adequate to the needs of rapidly growing communities? How much co-operation has been achieved between local authorities in dealing with common problems? These questions are likely to be best answered in well documented histories of the development of local government in our urban and metropolitan areas. We should not overlook the value of study also of the county system in its early years and, in particular, its relation to the Road Boards. Rather more specialised but nevertheless important, are the questions bearing on financial problems and also on the internal administration of the local authorities.

These are problems which the historian is likely to solve mainly through the detailed and often laborious search of the local authority archives. Efforts have already been made with some success for the preservation of these archives. Unfortunately, the progress made so far has been confined chiefly to Otago and Canterbury. It is important that we should renew our efforts for the preservation of this group of archives, particularly in rapidly growing regions like Auckland. The problems, however, of local government in New Zealand, are not merely related to efficient administration, though these are certainly important. How to obtain the interest and participation of the individual citizen in the affairs of his local government, is a problem not less serious; indeed, without this interest and participation we cannot have good local government. We should therefore, I believe, be turning our attention to the preservation of the records of local ratepayers' associations, district progress societies, municipal party organsatons and similar groups where people meet to discuss their local problems and grievances and to draw up policies and plans of action for the better administration of their districts and towns. Often these associations are ephemeral, but their records may give valuable evidence of the problems that arise with the settlement and development of districts and towns.

Economic Development

There is a very wide field for research in New Zealand economic history. The results of this research could be important, not only for the understanding of our economic development but also in that they could also modify the approach and conclusions of both political and social historians. It is not possible in this paper to do more than indicate some of the kinds of business records that we should seek to preserve.

We need to preserve manuscripts and archives relating to the growth of our agricultural and pastoral industries. We may, for convenience, consider the problems of the growth of these industries from two

aspects: firstly, problems of production and, secondly, those of marketing. Some of the questions likely to be asked about production will require information about the changes in the kinds of farming brought about by development; the provision of land for farming settlements; farm management; and the effects of the application of science, technological improvements and other factors on productivity.

The problems of marketing primary products have always been important in our economy, although with the development of the economy the nature of these problems has changed. Some of the important sources of evidence for the student are likely to be the archives of dairy factories, meat freezing works, tanneries and flour mills. For the later period of controlled marketing it is important that the archives of the various producers' marketing boards should be preserved. We should not overlook, of course, the importance of information bearing on the growth of the home markets, especially in the earlier years.

It is not possible, in the brief space left, to do more than emphasise the importance of preserving the records of not only the larger and older but also some of the more recently established manufacturing industries. We should also be doing a great deal more to encourage the proper care and preservation of archives of trade unions and other institutions concerned with the conditions of employment of labour.

If, as we have had to admit, there are serious gaps in the manuscript collections of interest to the political and social historians, how should we describe our collections of business records. The answer must be to the effect that there has been no serious attempt in New Zealand to preserve business archives.

The preservation of these archives is admittedly a difficult task and one that is not likely to be quickly solved. Our immediate aim should be to persuade commercial firms and other economic institutions to accept the idea of the preservation of their archives: later we may be able to persuade at least some institutions to allow their archives to be used by responsible research students. We should not, however, expect too much. One fact we have to face is that archives of institutions which hold a special place of trust in the community are not likely to be open to research students within our lifetime. Nevertheless, I believe that with initiative and energy we can at least prevent the destruction of these archives. The problem of access can be left for later solution.

There is still the very practical problem of how should we go about ensuring the preservation of business archives. At present our policy is mainly one of chance: we accept records offered for deposit, and we may, by good fortune and by the "grape vine", intervene to save records about to be destroyed. A more satisfactory approach would be to select key industries and institutions in our economy and make a survey of their records along the same lines as that carried out in respect of local authorities. This would be an ambitious project and would call for careful preparation. Possibly the project is beyond our resources at present, but it deserves thought and decision.